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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Iran
- [1](#)2. Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that the 1,478 convention delegates of the divided Labor Party will come together this afternoon in Tel Aviv to decide whether to join PM-designate Benjamin Netanyahu's

national-unity government or try to bring it down from the opposition. The Jerusalem Post reported that supporters and opponents of joining the government both expressed confidence yesterday that they would emerge victorious in the secret ballot vote, the results of which will be available as early as 8 p.m. HaQaretz reported that seven of Labor's 13 Knesset members are opposed to joining Netanyahu's coalition. The media reported that Likud MK Moshe Ya'alon, who was slated to become defense minister in the new government, revealed yesterday that he had reached an understanding with Netanyahu regarding his portfolio if a national unity government is formed. The media also reported that United Torah Judaism (UTJ) will not join a government that does wholesale conversions. Maariv noted that Netanyahu cannot form a government if both Labor and UTJ do not join his government.

Electronic media reported that this morning Netanyahu and Labor Chairman Ehud Barak agreed that Israel would draft a comprehensive regional peace treaty and that Israel is committed to all agreements it has signed so far. The media further reported that Barak will be a partner in all diplomatic-security forums and that construction in settler outposts and by Palestinians would be monitored.

Maariv quoted Palestinian sources as saying that Ofer Dekel, PM Ehud Olmert's point man on the Gilad Shalit issue, is pressuring Hamas prisoners in Israel, saying that this is their last chance to go free.

Leading media quoted IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi as saying yesterday that he does not believe that IDF soldiers harmed Palestinian civilians in "cold blood" during the Gaza offensive, in his first response to a HaQaretz expose revealing testimonies given by troops who served in Operation Cast Lead.

HaQaretz reported that yesterday the GOI decided to allow "all edible goods to be delivered to the population of Gaza." The decision was not announced to the media and was only briefly mentioned in the summary of the weekly meeting. Leading media quoted Radhika Coomaraswamy, the UN Secretary-General's envoy for protecting children in armed conflict, as saying yesterday that IDF soldiers used an 11-year-old Palestinian boy as a human shield during Operation Cast Lead. The army allegedly ordered the boy to walk in front of soldiers being fired on in the Gaza neighborhood of Tel al-Hawa and enter buildings before them. Coomaraswamy was quoted as saying that the incident on Jan. 15, after IDF tanks had rolled into the neighborhood, was a violation of Israeli and international law. The Jerusalem Post quoted Alan Baker, formerly the Foreign Ministry's legal adviser, as saying that even though allegations of war crimes in Gaza are being used by some to delegitimize Israel, it is incumbent on Israel to investigate the allegations to show the world it is taking the matter seriously. Maariv reported that the Israel Air Force is establishing a new anti-aircraft battalion whose task will be to learn the Iron Dome system for intercepting Qassam and Grad rockets fired from Gaza at Sderot and at the Gaza periphery communities in the western Negev. The Air Force believes that within four months the anti-aircraft battalion will install the system and begin training, and in tandem, will develop a new fighting doctrine versus the launching tactics of the Palestinian terror organizations. Maariv quoted a high-ranking security source as saying that the system would be able to handle the short-range rocket threats quite well and would also be able to deal with shells with a 155 millimeter caliber. The future task of the new battalion will be to receive the Magic Wand system now being developed that is earmarked to provide a response to medium-range rockets. Maariv cited the belief of Israeli security officials that these two systems will significantly change how Israel deals with terrorist organizations and will even prompt them to find new threats with which to attack IDF soldiers and residents of southern Israel.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe quoted Palestinian Minister for Civil Affairs Muhammad Dahlan as saying that the PLO never recognized Israel and that the PA government recognizes Israel on purely technical grounds. Leading media reported that Kamal Madhat, the PLO's deputy envoy to Lebanon, was killed in a car blast near the Palestinian refugee camp of Mia Mia. Media reported that Hamas blamed Israel for the murder.

The media reported that over 2,500 police will be on duty today in

and around Umm el-Fahm, Israel's largest Arab city, where right-wing protesters plan to march after receiving High Court approval. The media also reported that yesterday the head of the northern branch of Israel's Islamic Movement, Sheikh Raed Salah, was detained for questioning in Jerusalem, together with his bodyguard and three other individuals. Police were quoted as saying that the five were arrested after they refused to leave an illegal meeting in East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and attempted to assault police officers. The gathering was part of the events of the Palestinian Culture Festival, marking the choice by UNESCO of Jerusalem as the Capital of Arab Culture for 2009. Police were acting in accordance with a law banning demonstrations of Palestinian sovereignty in Jerusalem.

Leading media reported that yesterday the parents of critically wounded American protester Tristan Anderson called on the police to launch a criminal investigation into the border policeman who shot a high-velocity tear gas canister that hit their son on the forehead in the Palestinian village of NaQalin earlier this month.

Yediot reported that Italy has ordered the deportation of three Palestinians whom Israel exiled in 2002 after they barricaded themselves in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

Leading media quoted the Foreign Ministry as saying yesterday that the U.K. was refusing to apologize after its statements about Israeli companies deceiving European tax authorities proved unsubstantiated. The issue was the suspension of tariffs on goods from within the Green Line, but not from the territories.

Maariv quoted IDF Chief of Staff Ashkenazi as saying yesterday that this year 82% of newly drafted IDF soldiers requested to serve in combat units.

Major media reported that yesterday a court in Yemen sentenced a man to death for contacting and offering to spy for Israel. Bassam al-Haidari, 26, was found guilty of sending an e-mail to PM Ehud Olmert and offering his services. Two other defendants, aged 23 and 24, were sentenced to prison. The men, who are said to be members of the anti-Yemeni government Organization of Islamic Jihad, went on trial in January. According to the court, Olmert responded to Haidari's e-mail, offering to support him as a foreign agent. Israeli military officials deny the claim.

All media reported that, citing the global and local recession, vanishing inflation, and monetary policy moves around the world, the Bank of Israel lowered its overnight rate for April to a historic low of 0.5%. The media reported that financial analysts were not impressed by the move.

The Jerusalem Post reported on cooperation between the Weizmann Institute and San Diego State University in the observation of the Qlargest exploding star ever seen.

HaQaretz and The Jerusalem Post cited the results of a poll released yesterday by the dovish, pro-Israel lobby J Street: American Jews are evenly divided over whether the U.S. should launch a military offensive against Iran if it acquires nuclear weapons. The poll shows that 41% of American Jews favor such an attack, 40% oppose one and 16% chose "neither." The poll also showed that the overwhelming majority of American Jews (76%) favor a two-state solution as the preferred way to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to the poll, some 72% support the Obama administration's first steps in attempting to resolve the Israeli-Arab dispute. Also, 76% say Obama is a supporter of Israel, while 69% agree that he has a positive vision that can advance the Middle East peace process. While three-fourths of American Jews supported the Gaza operation and Israel's right to defend itself, 59% claimed the war had no impact on Israel's security. The poll also showed that 60% of U.S. Jews oppose settlement expansion in the West Bank while 40% are in favor. Among Orthodox Jews, 80% support more building in the settlements. Among Jews who donate to political campaigns, 72% oppose settlement expansion. Sixty-nine percent of respondents are opposed to the views of Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Beiteinu conditioning Arab Israel's citizenship on their loyalty to the state.

1. Iran:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: QWhile the Americans are actively seeking a way to start a dialogue, Israel is preaching confrontation and the toppling of the government in Tehran.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: QIn his heart of hearts, Obama surely knows that Khamenei's QpriceQ for good relations is America's total capitulation to Persian imperial designs. To point this out is not to beat the drums of war, but to appeal for American clear-sightedness.

Block Quotes:

I. "With Obama to Iran"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (3/24): QWhile Israel is preoccupied with cobbling together a coalition and with the ongoing incarceration of Gilad Shalit, significant changes are taking place in our strategic sphere. The most significant of these was the public message U.S. President Barack Obama sent to the people and government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a videotaped message on the occasion of Nauruz, the Persian New Year. Obama offered to bring about a new era of American-Iranian relations, after three decades of disconnect and enmity.... A few hours after Obama's message was broadcast, President Shimon Peres sent a similar message from Israel to the people of Iran, in which he harshly attacked President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for denying the Holocaust, called on the people of Iran to topple their leaders, and promised that Israel would survive. The contrast between the two messages -- one from Washington and one from Jerusalem -- says much about the different approaches taken by Israel and the U.S. regarding Iran: While the Americans are actively seeking a way to start a dialogue, Israel is preaching confrontation and the toppling of the government in Tehran.... It is clearly in Israel's interest to halt Iran's nuclear program, but it is no less in our interests to have close ties and a coordinated policy with the U.S. The new government should give Obama's diplomatic initiative a chance; it must not come out against it or portray it as tacit acceptance of a nuclear-armed Iran or as American abandonment of Israel's security. The initial reaction in Iran to Obama's message was far from enthusiastic, but this is just the beginning of the dialogue. If Obama manages to reduce the rising tide of tension in the region and to introduce a new framework of dialogue and cooperation between nations, he will have made an important contribution to Israel's security and to its international standing. This is the approach that should guide Netanyahu when he holds his first meeting with President Obama at the White House.

II. "Children of Adam"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (3/24): QEven Western QrealistsQ who reject appeasement, talk paternalistically about coaxing Iran into behaving more responsibly. They intuit that Iran's Qtrue interestQ lies in improved relations with the civilized world. It's only that the mullahs' Qwell-grounded mistrustQ of the West makes them exceedingly cautious. Were the stakes not so high, America's astute President, having inherited a calamitous economy, two wars and much else, could be forgiven for seeking to avoid confrontation with Iran -- even if he rejects the apologists' line outright and thinks the realists are, well, unrealistic. In his heart of hearts, Obama surely knows that Khamenei's QpriceQ for good relations is America's total capitulation to Persian imperial designs. To point this out is not to beat the drums of war, but to appeal for American clear-sightedness.

2. Mideast:

Summary:

Veteran journalist and anchor Yaron London wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QThere is no chance for peace until Palestinian society changes and the wave of Islamic fanaticism subsides.

Conservative international Jewish leader Isi Leibler wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: QThe ambiguity of the U.S. stance is highlighted by the fact that simultaneously with the announcement suspending its participation in Durban 2, America proclaimed that it would henceforth partake in proceedings of the UN Human Rights Council.

Liberal columnist Yael Paz-Melamed wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QLiberal columnist Yael Paz-Melamed wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (3/24): QSomeone must prevent the establishment of a narrow right-wing establishment. That QsomeoneQ can only be the Labor Party.

Block Quotes:

II. "Where Will We Lead Despair?"

Veteran journalist and anchor Yaron London wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (3/24): QSubstantial questions exist: Is there a chance for peace before Palestinian society can govern itself? Is the existence of the Labor Party essential in order to retain peace options? And is there determining importance in leaving defense in the hands of Ehud Barak? I answer negatively to the first question. There is no chance for peace until Palestinian society changes and the wave of Islamic fanaticism subsides.... This is true for the second question. The Labor Party will not find rehabilitation by sitting in the opposition, because it does not possess a paradigm-changing concept.... To the third question I answer: QWho cares?Q Barak, a marvelously gifted person who totally lacks political talent, will make no difference either in the government or in the opposition.

II. "Otherwise Lieberman Will Be the Dominant Factor"

Liberal columnist Yael Paz-Melamed wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (3/24): QSomeone must prevent the establishment of a narrow right-wing government. That QsomeoneQ can only be the Labor Party. Paradoxically, such a move would severely harm the party, particularly Ehud Barak, but it would be the lifeline that many have been yearning for.

III. "The Obama Administration, Durban, and American Jews"

Conservative international Jewish leader Isi Leibler wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (3/24): QIt may be premature to celebrate the U.S. withdrawal [from the Durban 2 conference]. The decision not to participate was made with a caveat that the U.S. would reconsider its decision if the preparatory committee amended its draft and deleted some of the most offensive sections. In fact since then, the Durban organizers have come to the realization that by accepting an abbreviated draft excluding the most offensive sections, the U.S. could conceivably still attend and that would encourage most of the wavering European and other countries to do likewise.... The ambiguity of the U.S. stance in this matter is highlighted by the fact that simultaneously with the announcement suspending its participation in Durban 2, America proclaimed that it had revoked the Bush administration's boycott and would henceforth partake in proceedings of the UN Human Rights Council and even seek election to the council. U.S. legitimization of this bizarre body is unquestionably a retrograde step. Contrary to its Orwellian title, the council is the antithesis of human rights, and spends most of its time demonizing Israel and promoting the interests of the Islamic Council. It is totally dominated by Islamic and rogue states and will undoubtedly continue providing a platform for promoting anti-Semitism and other evil practices.

CUNNINGHAM